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ABSTRACT

The San Diego Community College District (SDCCD), in California, is a multi-college district in which many students cross-enroll in two or more colleges. Beginning in 1978, the District began efforts to align courses and programs across the individual colleges, including the implementation of districtwide accreditation and procedures related to instruction and educational program approval. Curriculum development at SDCCD, however, remained slow and difficult to track. As a result, a curriculum reform process was undertaken in 1996 involving the individual colleges' academic senates and the District Chancellor. The group decided to create new curriculum approval procedures, rather than revise the existing ones, with the new procedures undergoing a full shared governance review by college curriculum committees, senates, deans, and vice presidents of instruction. The new process reaffirms the commitment to course alignment and the primacy of local curriculum committees in developing new programs, while innovative elements of the process include an easy-to-follow, step-by-step process; the inclusion of consultation and concurrence among discipline faculty throughout the District as a formal part of the process; and the addition of academic senate representation on the District-level Instructional Council. Finally, SDCCD has begun plans to put the new process online through the addition of document management groupware to the District's network, allowing users to process curriculum data much like electronic mail is used. (TGI)

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AVOIDING ENTROPY:

REFORMING THE CURRICULUM APPROVAL PROCESS IN A MULTI-COLLEGE DISTRICT

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Presenters:

Augustine P. Gallego has been chancellor of the San Diego Community College District since 1990. Prior to becoming chancellor, he held several leadership positions in the SDCCD. From 1976 to 1990 he moved from associate dean of student services to dean, then provost of continuing education and districtwide director of instructional and student services. Before that, he served as associate dean of student affairs at the University of California Davis from 1970-72, and associate director of admissions at UC Davis from 1972-76.

Diane Glow received her B.A. from Western Michigan University in psychology in 1966, and her Ms.Ed and Ed.D in counseling from Indiana University in 1970 and 1976. The began her career with San Diego Miramar College in April 19978 as a counselor; spent 10 years at San Diego Mesa College and the SDCCD headquarters working with the Disabled Students Programs and Services. In 1989 she returned to Miramar College as a counselor and articulation officer. While at Miramar, she has served as department chair, Academic Senate president, and currently is the Chair of Chairs at Miramar. She chairs the Southern California Intersegmental Articulation Council.

Mary Lou Locke has been a history professor at Mesa College since 1989, serving as vice-president and president-elect of the Mesa Academic Senate from 1992-2995, and senate president since the fall of 1995. Prior to her employment at Mesa College, she was a visiting lecturer at the University of California, San Diego, and San Diego State University between 1985-1989, and before that an assistant professor of urban history at Texas Tech University from 1983-85. She obtained her obtained a Phd in 1983 from UC San Diego, with an emphasis in social history, writing a doctoral thesis on working women in the urban far west.

John Markley, B.A. and M.A. in English from the University of San Diego, joined the San Diego City College Faculty in 1970. Besides teaching composition and literature, he has served as chair of the English Department (1982-1986 and 1994-1996). While department chair, he worked with San Diego State University coordinating City College faculty teaching on the SDSU campus. He is currently teaching basic skills and transfer level composition courses, and coordinating the accreditation self study for City College.

Introduction

This paper explores the evolution of the curriculum approval process in a multi-college district, from a chaotic, disjointed process in the early years of the district to a system that has now made great progress toward becoming a model for other districts. The early development of course and program alignment in the 1970s is briefly reviewed, followed by the process that has been in place since 1989, enumerating its strengths and detailing some of the difficulties in maintaining alignment throughout the three-college district while providing each college the flexibility to respond to the unique demands of its own student population.

The paper reveals how, through shared governance, the San Diego Community College District recently reviewed and reformed its approval process to solve its problems. This includes the development of a discipline team approach to faculty concurrence, the inclusion of faculty on the district level Instructional Council, while maintaining the pivotal role of the local curriculum committees, and the establishment of time limits and an appeal process.

The use of computer technology to speed up the curriculum approval process is also included in the paper.

San Diego Community College District Brief Profile

Located in Southern California, the San Diego Community College District service area includes a diverse population of one million residents within America's sixth largest city. Downtown San Diego is only 12 miles from the Mexican border where one million people reside in Tijuana. The San Diego Community College District serves almost 100,000 students each semester through three colleges and six continuing education centers. San Diego City College is an inner-city campus, serving a diverse population of 14,000 students (19% African American, 10% Asian, 4% Filipino, 21% Latino, 36% White). Mesa College, located in the urban residential community of Kearny Mesa, serves about 23,000 students (6% African American, 13% Asian, 6% Filipino, 12% Latino, 55% White). Miramar College is suburban campus of 9.700 students (6% African American, 10% Asian, 10% Filipino, 10% Latino, 56% White).

Historical Review

The San Diego Community College District is a multi-college district wherein many students cross enroll in two or more colleges. To illustrate the problem of this disjointed "system," a chemistry major at Mesa College during the day (8 a.m. to 4

p.m.) had different degree requirements than a chemistry major on that campus in the evening. And a chemistry major at City College had different requirements than either of the two.

In 1978 the district began to look at course alignment districtwide. There were four separately accredited colleges--City, Mesa, Miramar and Evening College--with separate curriculum and placement exams. The chancellor decided to consolidate the process to a district accreditation. The process became a fiasco because of a lack of cohesiveness in the self-study processes and operations. This highlighted the need for organization of systems.

The function of Evening College was then reassessed and dismantled, merging programs and personnel into the other three colleges.

The Board of Trustees envisioned a computerized system that could pull together operations at the three campuses, such as student registration and financial aid. The frustrations of students attempting to cross-register presented the need for common-course numbering. At that time there were four separate files of courses. Automation of procedures further emphasized the need for curriculum alignment. The actual process of aligning courses and programs took approximately two and one-half years. Department chairs were given reassigned time to write course outlines and review programs.

The passage of the Matriculation Bill by the California Legislature in 1984 led to identification of state approved placement instruments for colleges.

The Instructional Council was operating at the district level at this time. This group was comprised of the vice presidents of instruction and the district associate chancellor for instruction. There were no faculty representatives on the Instructional Council. The curriculum initiated on the campus would first go through campus curriculum scrutiny, then to the other two colleges for concurrence, and finally to the Instructional Council before submission to the Board of Trustees, as appropriate. Complicating the process, general education courses submitted for approval went to a separate district General Education Committee.

The community college reform law of 1988 (AB1725) created curriculum committees in California community colleges with faculty having the primary role in academic and professional matters.

In 1989, the SDCCD vice chancellor and academic senate presidents developed Policy 5300 and implementation procedures on instruction and educational program approval. In fall 1995, two faculty representatives from each college and continuing education were added to the district Instructional Council membership.

Over time, problems became apparent, as the process was slow, hard to track, and concurrence was being perceived by many as a means of veto power over other colleges' proposals. During the fall 1995, one college brought forward the culmination of three years of sweeping curriculum changes they made because of complaints by students and counselors that the needs of students were not being served by the configuration of the college's programs and the presentation in the catalog. The major effort to move this curriculum through the district's existing approval process served to exacerbate the problems and highlighted the weaknesses in the process. In Spring 1996, the chancellor and the academic senate presidents met to address these problems, which subsequently resulted in the new process.

1996 Curriculum Reform Process

In the spring of 1996, the leadership of the academic senates agreed that it was necessary to rewrite the existing procedures for curriculum approval. Apart from the general faculty frustration with how confusing and time-consuming the process had become, there were two major precipitating factors in that decision.

First, a curriculum and catalog reform project undertaken byCity College had nearly failed in the previous semester because the existing process did not seem capable of providing sufficient program flexibility nor speed to accommodate their activities. At City College, a zealous articulation officer and dedicated counselors and curriculum committee members had worked with department chairs for more than a year to convince the general faculty that their programs needed revision to ensure truth in advertising in the catalog and compliance with state regulations regarding the number of required units. Yet here the apparent disadvantages of membership in a multi-college district, given the clunky state of the curriculum and catalog change approval process, seemed destined to sidetrack City's work. Only unity among the academic senates and a pledge to revamp the approval process broke through the gridlock and permitted City College to move forward.

The second precipitating factor was the urgent need to organize the faculty districtwide to validate all prerequisites and review and rewrite all their course outlines in order to bring the entire district curriculum into compliance with state regulations. These were tasks that all California community colleges faced, but the San Diego district was woefully behind in the process, in part, because of the difficulties inherent in the existing curriculum approval system.

As a result, the senate presidents joined with the district chancellor in March 1996 to review and rewrite the existing curriculum approval procedures. First the small working group decided to work from scratch--creating a new document rather than revising the old one. Next, major principles were defined, the responsibilities of each level of review enumerated, and a step-by-step approval process was

developed.

Once the initial draft of the procedures was completed in the summer of 1996, the full shared governance review process began, with college curriculum committees, senates, deans and vice presidents of instruction all consulted, and a second draft produced to address the State's concerns from all those quarters. Since the writing process occurred while the district went on with the tasks of reviewing curriculum, agreeing on standards for course outlines and mounting a districtwide requisites review, the principles and processes being developed in the new approval process were tested daily, and the lessons learned were funnelled back to the group writing the final draft, which was then reviewed again by the senates and signed by the chancellor.

The new curriculum approval process is really a mixture of old and new. For example, the commitment to course alignment and the primacy of the local curriculum committees were reaffirmed. One of the major innovations was to make consultation and concurrence among the discipline faculty throughout the district a formal and documented part of the process that would have to occur before any other body reviewed the proposed curriculum. It is hoped that this will not only facilitate the task of program review that is required periodically, but that it will also prevent the course proposals from circulating around and around the district for literally years as the course outlines are rewritten over and over.

A second innovation is the addition of academic senate representation on the district level Instructional Council (something that has been tested informally for the past year), and the decision to give this new Curriculum Instructional Council the power to review and resolve disagreements in curriculum matters. The active participation of faculty at the district level has encouraged communication among faculty at all three colleges, promoted more rapid dissemination of information, and provided for greater consistency in the curriculum approval process. While concurrence among the departments and curriculum committees of all three colleges remains the goal, in the past, disagreements have led to stalemate, and the result not only made it more difficult to move quickly to respond to students' needs, it often permitted a few individuals to essentially practice a form of pocket veto.

Next, the new step-by-step nature of the approval process not only makes it easier for faculty untrained in curriculum development to follow, but it has built into it time limits and a clear description of who is responsible for moving curriculum proposals along at each step, which should take care of the feeling on the part of faculty that once they had filled out the paperwork, it entered a black hole, never to be seen again.

Finally, the new process has slightly shifted the roles of department chairs in

curriculum development. Under the old system, the signature of the department chair indicated concurrence. However, it was never clear whether this meant concurrence by all the faculty in the department or the particular discipline--and it often reflected a terribly time-consuming part of a chair's responsibilities if the department was large, or contained numerous different disciplines. It was also unclear if the chair had any additional responsibilities, or if they could, of their own volition, refuse to forward curriculum or require changes. The new process shifts the main responsibility to the discipline faculty themselves and brings the process into alignment with the statewide Academic Senate's recommendation of good practices that the chairs' role should be to facilitate the curriculum process but not to have approval authority.

Conclusion and Plans for On-line Curriculum Approval Process

A proposed on-line curriculum approval system will be developed using the latest document management technology. The current wide area network, which encompasses three colleges, six continuing education centers and the district administrative offices, will be augmented by the addition of document management groupware. Customized client applications will allow users to process curriculum data much like electronic mail is used.

Access by faculty, administrators and clerical staff will be via microcomputers equipped with Microsoft windows. Users will launch a customized curriculum approval system application. An assortment of easily identifiable icons will allow the end user to propose a new course, request a change, check the status of a proposal, indicate concurrence, select and view a course description, course outline, or program; or perform a variety of queries. Course outlines and reports will be easily generated. File extracts can be created for import into related applications, such as the ASSIST intersegmental database of articulation information. Long-term storage of curriculum forms will be converted to CD-ROM and will be accessible from the desktop.

A curriculum approval system will integrate the district's many curriculum files and documents and facilitate improved access to curriculum by faculty and staff. Multiple levels of security will be included to protect the district's curriculum information, provide flexible access, and to ensure that final changes are made and authorized per the procedures in place. The approval process will be streamlined by the recent augmentations to the district's information technology infrastructure, which provides numerous access points at the campuses and district administrative offices.

An efficient and effective curriculum approval process, incorporating the latest technology, can provide a system that is responsive to the changing needs of students, industry and society.